



CAREER PATHWAYS INITIATIVE

CAREER PATHWAYS DEFINITION & FRAMEWORK

Career pathway-oriented workforce development has the goal of increasing individuals' educational and skills attainment and improving their employment outcomes while meeting the needs of local employers and growing sectors and industries. Career pathway programs offer a clear sequence, or *pathway*, of education coursework and/or training credentials aligned with employer-validated work readiness standards and competencies. This systems approach makes it easier for people to earn industry-recognized credentials (through more flexible avenues and opportunities for relevant education and training) and to attain marketable skills so that they can more easily find work in growing careers. These comprehensive education and training systems are particularly suited to meeting the needs of working learners and non-traditional students. Career pathway programs feature the following characteristics:

- **Sector Strategy** – Career pathway education and training programs align with the skill needs of industries important to the regional or state economies in which they are located, and reflect the fact that employers in the targeted industry sectors are actively engaged in determining the skill requirements for employment or career progression in high-demand occupations.
- **Stackable Educational/Training Options** – Career pathway programs include the full range of secondary, adult education, and postsecondary education options, including registered apprenticeships; they use a non-duplicative progression of courses clearly articulated from one level of instruction to the next; they provide opportunities to earn postsecondary credits; and they lead to industry-recognized and/or postsecondary credentials.
- **Contextualized Learning** – Career pathway education and training programs focus on curriculum and instructional strategies that make work a central context for learning and help students attain work readiness skills.
- **Integrated Education & Training** – As appropriate for the individual, Career pathway programs combine occupational skills training with adult education services, give credit for prior learning, and adopt other strategies that accelerate the educational and career advancement of the participant.
- **Industry-recognized Credentials** – Effective Career pathway programs lead to the attainment of industry-recognized degrees or credentials that have value in the labor market.
- **Multiple Entry & Exit Points** – Career pathway programs allow workers of varying skill levels to enter or advance within a specific sector or occupational field.
- **Intensive Wrap-Around Services** – Career pathway systems incorporate academic and career counseling and wrap-around support services (particularly at points of transition), and they support the development of individual career plans.
- **Designed for Working Learners** – Career pathway programs are designed to meet the needs of adults and non-traditional students who often need to combine work and study. They provide childcare services and accommodate work schedules with flexible and non-semester-based scheduling, alternative class times and locations, and innovative uses of technology.

